



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE USE OF LITERARY MATERIAL IN TEACHING COMPOSITION.

It is easy to recognize a vital relation between the appreciation of literature and the writing of good English. To decide just how literary material should be applied in practice to the teaching of composition is quite another matter. There are three ways, not always consciously discriminated, in which this problem has been met; all three are, in varying degrees and in various combinations, in use at the present time. In deciding among them, we have to recognize that we approach the question not as propounders of the science of rhetoric, nor as students of the art of rhetoric, but as teachers of composition. We are interested to know, not how writing might be explained or how it could be learned, but how, given our pupils such as they are, it should be taught.

The first two of these methods have almost always, in works of rhetoric, been unconsciously confounded. They are alike in teaching by authority, but they vest this authority in different ways. The one submits to certain empirical rules, actually drawn, doubtless, from personal experience and from the masterpieces commended by success, but stated from the first in a dogmatic manner. In this method examples are used merely to illustrate the rules. The other method takes as models definite works of literary art, which are to be imitated either in general, or in respect to their processes as discovered by a fresh and personal analysis. One method has an abstract and absolute standard of excellence, the other a concrete and varying object of imitation. As far as the individual pupil goes, the one method makes literature a servant; the other, a master. Different as these two methods are, they were always confused by the ancients. More recently, however, the two methods have been more clearly discriminated. The rhetoricians proper have for the most part followed the former system; that is, they have held allegiance to empirical rules, using examples to explain,

commend, and enforce them. The rules chosen have been those formulated by Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, which, translated, retranslated, and reworded, but scarcely changed or even developed, have been the basis of rhetorical teaching for centuries. As late as Campbell and Whately they were still used. Indeed, the rhetorics upon which some of us at least were brought up, the rhetorics of Genung and Hill, are, for all their interest and rationality of presentation, based on the same empirical rules, illustrated by similar examples. Mr. Genung, in fact, frankly states in his preface that he shows how a "rhetorical principle looks in application," because then the student "cannot gainsay it." There are still few text-books indeed that are entirely without traces of this system of dogma, enforced or recommended by examples.

A system so honored during long ages and firmly entrenched in almost universal practice certainly deserves respectful consideration; yet it is plainly an instance of dogmatism. It practically says: "There is only one way to write well; see all these great men who have followed this way; or if in particular they did not follow it, so much the worse for them. Do you also, therefore, follow the appointed path!" Such dogmatism in other spheres of opinion has been gradually retreating before the independence of Protestantism, and the new information given by science. But the fortunate human habit of applying logic fiercely to one tradition while all the others pass unquestioned, has let independent men submit to dogmatic rhetoricians for centuries after they revolted from a dogmatic priesthood. The first objection, accordingly, to using literary material as the aid and ornament of an arbitrary rhetoric, is that this system is both unprotestant and undemocratic.

The test we fixed upon as decisive, however, is the pedagogical one. Is the use of literature to commend dogma the best use from the point of view of the teacher of composition? The system would mean for us that, by the authority of big words and great names, assisted by the peaceable dispositions of the pupils, we hold up for them to work by some "rhetorical principles," or "literary standard," or whatever you like to call

it, which is not the outcome of their own untrammelled thinking. It is a platitude of psychology that it is things wrought out by the individual that best stick in the memory, and that most widely by means of complex associations permeate all thinking. The imposing of an exterior standard does not call into play independent individual activity; therefore its banishment from our American system of teaching is assured.

The second method in which literary material has been made to serve the ends of teachers of composition is, we remember, through imitation. This may take either of two forms: it may consist of the copying, consciously directed or in vaguely general way, of individual masterpieces; or it may begin with the dissection of these masterpieces to discover the methods on which they have been constructed, which the student is then to apply. Neither of these forms, however, is often found unalloyed; they are confused and combined with each other, and with the contrasting method of submission to an external standard.

The great objection to this system Lewes, in his "Principles of Success in Literature," has very clearly stated as follows:

The fallacy about models is seen at once if we ask this simple question: Will the practice of a great writer justify a solecism in grammar or a confusion in logic? No. Then why should it justify any other detail not to be reconciled with universal truth? If we are forced to invoke the arbitration in the one case, we must do so in the other. Unless we set aside the individual practice whenever it is irreconcilable with general principles, we shall be unable to discriminate in a successful work those merits which *secured* from those demerits which *accompanied* success.

What does it mean, then, it might be asked, that so many of the great writers themselves have commended this method, and have in some cases proclaimed it as the one by which they themselves actually learned to write? Hazlitt, Symonds, Franklin, Mr. Howells, Stevenson — names enough come to mind. But Lewes himself says that one thing may be learned through the use of models; that is, "a nice discrimination in the use of the symbols which intelligibly express the shades of meaning, and kindle emotion." Both for the rudiments of language and again for the higher and more subtle qualities of style, we are obliged to imitate. We must accept the conventions of spelling,

punctuation, grammar, and vocabulary; and at the other end of the scale, we must, at least in the present stage of acoustics and æsthetics, train our ears by the harmony and cadences of those who have by nature ears more keen than we for the music and suggestiveness of articulated sounds. In babies, and in mature and advanced students of literary art, imitation is desirable and necessary. We teachers of composition, however, ought not to be occupied with teaching either the rudiments of language or the higher subtleties of style. We must notice vocabulary, of course, and some of the more obvious audible qualities of composition; but it is the larger matters, choice of material, arrangement, and structure, that should occupy us most. The other things will come unconsciously, in the degree we need them, through any systematic use of literary material; and consequently we need not take them into account in deciding what system we shall choose.

The form of imitation which consists of applying methods learned from the analysis of the classics needs perhaps a little separate consideration. "Such a book has conveyed its meaning," it says; "I will see what methods it has used, and copy them." This form of imitation seems safer than simple copying, and more rational than the use of literary material to inculcate the empirical rules that were imposed by some external authority. Yet the objection of Lewes is almost equally valid here; unless countless examples are compared, it is not certain whether the practice discovered by analysis is the cause of success, or only the accompaniment. Such rules are still empirical, and still, in a sense, dogmatic.

Even granting the comparative safety of the method from the literary craftman's point of view if sufficient examples be taken, there remains to apply the more pertinent pedagogical test upon which we agreed to base our conclusions. Is imitation, whether of style or of method, a good principle to use in the teaching of our pupils? The objection to the first system, that there was no place for personal activity, holds equally in the case of direct imitation. In regard to the appropriation of methods by means of analysis, it need not be true in the same

degree ; for the pupil can be led to analyze and appropriate for himself. There is, however, another objection which applies equally to the two forms of the system. Our pupils, as a rule, are already only too liable to the kind of imitation called, variously, conventionalism, sentimentality, and lack of personal observation. The thing of all others that we have to work most for is that the students should dare to look at things with their own eyes, and believe things on their own responsibility. It would be absurd to overthrow the unsteady results of so much painstaking by a system confessedly based on imitation.

Two methods of using literary material in teaching composition we have found open to grave objections. We have now reached the consideration of the third. The path to it was indicated by Lewes, in the closing sentence of that section on "Imitation of the Classics" which was quoted before. He says :

A true philosophy of criticism would reduce these empirical rules to science by ranging them under psychological laws, thus demonstrating the validity of the rules, not in virtue of their having been employed by Cicero or Addison, by Burke or Sydney Smith, but in virtue of their conformity with the constancies of human nature.

These "constancies of human nature" and scientific rhetorical principles are at last being sought out with an eager industry that is well known ; but all attempts at formulating the principles of rhetoric still show great tentativeness and diversity. For the teacher of composition this is certainly a perplexing and tantalizing state of things ; yet it is not without its advantages. Each teacher has to make his own rules, those which, after all, work best ; and he finds it more natural to lead his pupils to do the same.

If then, our principles being grounded in the truths of psychology and formulated by the pupils themselves, are neither based on the practice of great authors nor dependent on them as unconscious advocates, in just what manner are the practice of communication and the appreciation of the great examples of it—really, as we saw, so closely related—to tell upon each other in our teaching? The impossibility that composition should thrive divorced from literature is evident very early in any theme course. When the student has been led to formulate,

by watching his own experience, certain principles as to how he can best convey to his audience what he wishes to tell them ; after he has tried to put these principles in practice in his later work ; then, when the novelty has worn off, there is danger lest he lose ambition and ingenuity, and fall back into the old habit of just grinding out a theme. From this stage on, he needs to have kept before him these facts : that this process of communication he attempts is, in its degree, the same as that of literature ; that the problems he finds in describing the landlady's character by means of her waste-basket, are the problems triumphed over by great novelists ; that subjects that may seem to him a little sterile in suggestiveness have been actually treated by the masters so as to be excitingly interesting ; and, more important still, that his own work is, in comparison with theirs, not so very successful after all. Our third system, then, is one, not of imitation, but of emulation, or, better still, of stimulation. We read Thackeray and Stevenson in class for precisely the same reason that we read the better work of the students. We read themes, do we not, because this gives a chance for active class discussion of the nature and success of the means used ; because it tends to show what interesting material all the students have at hand, and how clearly and entertainingly it can be presented ; and because it rouses ambition both in the student whose work has once been read, and in the others who would like to do work worthy of that honor ? Now literary material, skilfully chosen, not only does all these things in a far greater degree, but it excites a worthier and more efficient ambition. The ambition that would do well in the sight of the other students, that would perhaps do well to get ahead of the other students, is a normal human motive, which, as teachers, we are justified in turning to account ; yet it is a pitiable waste of time and energy. The impersonal ambition, on the other hand, that keeps the end alone in view, unpreoccupied as it is by excited dreaming about consequences, results in a less divided energy, calmer and steadier work, and a clearer sight of whatever may be the subject for the day. To promote a constant sense of ends at once high, delightful, and definite, towards which the students are helping each other on—

this is the great use of literature as applied to composition. By using it in this way we reach, in a far higher degree than by either of the other methods, the real aim of modern pedagogy, the rousing in the students of the greatest possible amount of enlightened yet independent activity.

In deciding upon the practical methods by which to apply this system, we must not forget the vital relation which we recognized at the beginning between the two parts of instruction in English: teaching the students to write and teaching them to appreciate. Our use of literary material, then, should not only stimulate them in composition, but give them, some such notion of the charm of books as will induce them to read much and intelligently on every Saturday and Sunday from October to June, during the Christmas and Easter holidays, and through every summer.

When we ask ourselves how to meet this double problem of rousing by means of literary material the greatest possible amount of personal activity both in writing and in reading, there are two distinct questions that come up for consideration. We need to decide on what grounds our literary material should be chosen, and in what manner it should be presented and discussed. We will take up these questions in their order.

The extracts chosen, it almost goes without saying, should be valuable in themselves from a literary point of view. We have no time to give to illustrations taken out of *Munsey's*, however apt and timely they may be. Passages should not be quoted merely for mistakes, except in rare instances where the faults are unmistakable and ridiculous; above all things, they should not be chosen to illustrate mistakes really made by the students; they should never, for example, contain a touch of sentimentality. Every moment we let the students spend in considering the common is so much time taken from getting the desired stimulus from the excellent. Let us remember, then, to work chiefly with material that is really literature.

The material used, however, excellent as it ought to be, should not always obviously illustrate the principle under discussion. There is nothing more conducive to the lazily acquies-

cent state of mind we are so anxious to do away with, than to let the pupil feel "it must begin with general effect, or it would not be read." Fortunately the world of books is large; every stated principle has been ignored by some men, especially less modern men, who are nevertheless truly great; and has been neglected sometimes by men who in general put it in practice. We can accordingly find many illustrations that are good as literature, without being too good for open-eyed discussion. A particularly useful class of illustrations tending toward the same end consists of those cases where a different principle from the one under discussion is being rightly applied. Such inapplicable illustrations need not be common, but they should be given often enough to keep the students alert and independent.

The material selected, again, may well be often such as deals with the present time, and with the homely facts of the students' own experience. Let them see what Miss Wilkins and Stephen Crane have done with such material. An equally fresh treatment of foreign scenes may often have a similar result. Give them to begin with more realism than idealism, and rather frank crudeness than polished elegance. The evidently sincere attitude of such work is contagious and inspiring, and the danger of imitation is proportionately small.

Another test of what selections to choose is that they should be interesting enough to waken the desired activity in the students' minds. This does not mean that they should ever be, or need ever be, merely entertaining. There is hardly a more mischievous mistake than to think that the average student, with his wits sharpened by class hour, does not enjoy a little difficulty. He is, on the contrary, eager and proud to puzzle over things. A good stiff bit of Pater, presented as a challenge to the students' intelligence, has brought fairly good results. There was, however, a general brightening of faces when the next illustration proved to be a description of the *Squirrel Inn* from Stockton. That brightening was perhaps partly due to the variety, which, indeed, is always necessary for the keeping awake of interest, as well as for that keeping in view of the boundless possibilities at which we aim. Extracts from books already familiar prove often

interesting, and are valuable, pedagogically, in still another way, in that they link the new to notions already in the mind. For this reason the works included in the college entrance requirements should in preparatory schools be drawn upon at every turn. Any statistics on books read by the students, too, can give helpful suggestions. From such inquiries it is clear that most young people have read *David Copperfield* and *David Harum*, and that most of them have read some of Hawthorne and George Eliot. When neither the author nor the book from which the extract is taken is familiar, it should at least afford some possibilities of being linked to former experience either through its subject-matter or through its associations.

Yet, needful as it is to quote from books already familiar, because their familiarity makes them interesting, it is even more needful, if we are to teach composition as part of a wider course in English, to arouse interest through the means just spoken of, in masterpieces that are still unfamiliar. We are not merely to teach to write by using old associations, but to teach to read by developing new ones. One pupil has been enough interested by extracts read in class from *Travels with a Donkey* to read the book through. Another copied the names of some of the books from which passages had been read. We should not, however, be satisfied with a few sporadic cases of interest; there are ways of consciously, if indirectly, increasing the number. It does something just to tell the name of the book and its author, and to take into class, not a book of extracts, nor a copy of the passage on a piece of paper, but the real book itself. It does more to find out what individuals can tell of the author and of the book in question, and even to add an interesting fact or two of one's own, that may in some way afford a link to ideas already familiar. It is useful to refer to the same man more than once; yet on the other hand, it is well to give a taste of a great variety of books, prose and poetry, biography, essays, travels, drama. The books chosen should not always be modern, or even always English. What we chiefly need to do is every day to give some tantalizing glimpses of new worlds. Such indirect suggestions, that do not tell the pupil that he ought to read, but let him guess

how much he might enjoy reading if he tried it, ought surely in the end to bring about in some few of a class an actual increase in first-hand knowledge of literature.

So much for choice of material in general. The decision as to what is to be used in any given class on any given day depends on so many things that it is hardly possible to make suggestions about it. There have to be considered the needs of the special class, both permanent and momentary; the tastes and critical tendencies the pupils have shown themselves to have; and whatever links to new material may have been afforded by recent themes, discussions, or previous quotation. It is often well to bring in illustrations of the masterly treatment of a subject similar to that of themes recently written and just discussed. We can say in general, too, that each selection should consider the actual position of the class, and aim at some real and definite advance; but for the rest, we should remember in each separate case that our aim is to stimulate the students to the greatest possible amount of personal activity both in writing and in appreciation, and decide accordingly.

If, then, it behooves us to make use of illustrations from the whole field of literature, old and new, native and foreign, familiar and unfamiliar, of passages apt and not too apt, by all authors from Kipling back to Chaucer and beyond, and of passages intimately adapted to the actual needs of each individual class—then, doubtless you are thinking, Where in all the busy week are we to get the time to hunt them down? For illustrations that, as vaguely remembered, seem just the things we want, prove, after being looked for in half a dozen books, to be quite different from what we remembered; and there is another hour wasted. This difficulty of finding illustrations is a very real one. One expedient, useful for many reasons, is to get the pupils to do the hunting for you. Let them bring their books to class and read the passage; or let them give you references, made out in the regular form, with publisher, date, and the rest; or, when in the course of discussion in class they refer to some passage as an illustration, ask them to show it to you, or to hunt up for you the exact reference. You get at least a small proportion of

illustrations intrinsically valuable for interest or aptness; and all are illustrations actively chosen by the pupils themselves. In enlarging their horizon, however, not much can be done in this way; for this, the passages must be selected by the teacher.

Even more important than choosing good material is the wise handling of it. It may be used either in class or in personal interviews; but, since the latter application must vary so widely according to the individual student, and since all the generalizations it is possible to make about this can be derived from those that apply to the use of such material in recitation, we may confine ourselves here to a consideration of how it may be used as a part of class work.

However interesting and pertinent the extract read, it needs always consciously to be presented as something vital, and it will almost invariably gain in effectiveness, as has been already suggested, by being connected with past experience; otherwise the lively personal activity we seek is not aroused. The questions and remarks about author and book, spoken of in another connection, are important for this reason also, and so are the very manner and delivery.

Suppose, now, that the class is interested and eager to begin discussion; how shall this discussion be directed so as to end in just the desired advance? If we have brought up the particular extract *à propos* of some problem already attempted and talked over by the students, the discussion will usually take of itself the desired direction. Sometimes a skilful question is of use, or the calling attention beforehand to some problem on which you wish opinions. Occasionally the class will find for itself a topic more helpful than the one intended by the teacher. But desultory chatter in class-hour is not more desirable when about literature than when about any other subject. The guidance should, of course, be indirect and little apparent, but it should always be directed toward some real and definite aim. It is not enough to plan that a given extract should stimulate to personal activity; we need to have in mind one particular kind of activity. Many such have been mentioned or implied already. Let us collect them here. In the first place, the discussion may include

a decision on the success of the illustration read. The students should state how completely they receive the impression the author intended to convey. That effort trains the critical power in a sane direction, and at the same time exercises the imagination, through conceiving suggested images, in a way that strengthens the power of forming original ones. Secondly, the discussion may include a consideration of the means employed to produce the impression, and especially of any applications of whatever principles the students have evolved for themselves. By this means new brain paths of association are established that confirm them in memory, interweave them more intimately through the field of thought, and vastly heighten their significance and develop their possibilities of application. Doubtless it will sometimes happen that a new method of application will be directly suggested by an extract; in such a case the students should be led to judge the method for themselves, and to apply it, not because it was used by Scott, but because, having noticed it in Scott, they find it rational.

After so much detail, let us in conclusion, lest we forget the end in the means, remind ourselves of the principle upon which all these detailed methods have been based. The aim of the teacher of composition in his use of literary material, we decided, should be to stimulate the pupil both to read and to write with independence, ambition, and energy.

BESSIE R. HOOKER.

VASSAR COLLEGE,
Poughkeepsie, N. Y.